

Bitterroot AUDUBON



JANUARY 2012

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 26, NO. 5

Bitterroot Audubon Presents: “A Fish Tale”

By Leslie Nyce



Courtesy Leslie Nyce

Chapter One:

Long, long ago the Bitterroot River and its tributaries teemed with just 10 native fish species. One of these species, a trout, is responsible for the Salish place names of Missoula, Milltown, Butte and Bonner. Historically this trout was caught in large quantities in the Jocko, Clark Fork, and Bitterroot Rivers, Mission Creek, Flathead and St. Mary's Lakes. It also provided the Flathead Tribe with a fishery at the junction of the Blackfoot and Clark Fork Rivers.



Courtesy Leslie Nyce

It is recorded that in the Jocko valley these fish were so big that their tails reached the ground when they were hung from a saddle on a horse. The largest one recorded in the Bitterroot drainage measured 35 ½ inches and weighed 12 ½ pounds. Which trout could be so famous you ask? Why, the Bull Trout, of course!!



Courtesy Leslie Nyce

Tune in to hear the rest of the story about this fascinating fish from Leslie Nyce, a Fish and Wildlife Biologist, who has studied the Bull Trout for the last two and a half years in the East Fork Bitterroot River as part of her Master's degree through the University of Montana. She will present her findings and discuss how that information is important for the survival of Bull Trout and fisheries management.

Join us on January 16, 2012 at 7:00 PM in the Forest Service/DNRC Building, 1801 N. First Street (Hwy 93, north end of Hamilton). Enter the building from the west side. For further information, call Kay Fulton at 642-3794.

Letter from the President

By Kay Fulton, BAS President

Welcome to 2012. I hope your holidays were good and that you are ready for another year of looking at and learning about birds, nature, and the environment. I think we should begin a project to develop a Bitterroot Audubon Society Calendar that will highlight what birds to see, when and where to observe them. Maybe with Wayne Tree's bird of the month collection and your documentation, we can make that happen. So get out your calendars and keep track. Then I'll figure out how to collect the data and pictures for our future calendar!!



Keep in mind: Snowy Owls, Snow Geese, Sandhill Cranes Migration in Nebraska, Swans, Pelicans, Loons, Waterfowl, Song Birds, Raptor Migration (calving), Spring Migration, The Great Backyard Bird Count in February, Drawing for the Scenic Bitterroot River Float March 1st (Get your raffle tickets now), "Welcome Back Waterfowl" in April at the Lee Metcalf Refuge, Montana Audubon Bird Festival, "Wings Across the Big Sky" in Kalispell June 8-10, 2012, Fall Migration and the 2012 Christmas Bird Count. Here's to our Big Birding Year!

-Kay

Motorboats on the Bitterroot

By Fred Weisbecker, Conservation Chair and BAS VP

Most of us have probably not given it much thought, but motorboats have always been greatly restricted on the Bitterroot River as well as many of Montana's other world class pristine waterways. With the addition of several boat ramps below Missoula on the Clark Fork River, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks wanted to take another look at those regulations. Thanks to an overwhelming response by conservation groups, including our Audubon Chapter, the FWP Commission ended up adopting new rules that were even more restrictive than those proposed by their own staff. During the scoping period there were 69 comments against liberalizing the rules and not one letter of support for the opposite. The Bitterroot River will continue to be closed to motorboat usage except for a traditional fall season (October 1 - January 15) for watercraft under 20 horsepower. Since the lower Bitterroot River is an integral part of our cottonwood gallery Important Bird Area (IBA) between Corvallis and Lolo, it was rewarding to see this process come to a successful solution. Groups like Trout Unlimited, the Clark Fork Coalition, local hunting and fishing

groups, riverside landowners and of course Montana Audubon came together to make the system work. Advocating for wildlife and its habitat does make a difference.

2012 *Wings Across the Big Sky* Field Trips and Keynote Speaker, Peter Sherrington

It's not too early to begin planning for your June vacation. During winter, when birds are sparse, it's easy to dream of long summer days and abundant birds. Where you will find plenty is in beautiful Flathead Valley. Come join us for **Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival, this year co-hosted by Flathead Audubon Society, June 8-10, 2012 at the [Hilton Garden Inn](#) in Kalispell.**

However, while birders and outdoor enthusiasts plan for summer, raptor experts were keeping track of spectacular fall migrations, and are now crunching the numbers from those counts. **Peter Sherrington is one of those experts, and we're thrilled to have him as our keynote speaker this year!** Peter is a geologist/paleontologist who in 1992 gave up a career in the oil industry to study Golden Eagle migration in Alberta's Rocky Mountains. He is the founder and Research Director of the Rocky Mountain Eagle Research Foundation and currently lives in the hamlet of Beaver Mines, Alberta. After Saturday morning's field trips you will want to join us for Peter's lunchtime keynote, "Twenty Years of Golden Eagle Migration Studies in the Alberta Rockies: the Big Picture Begins to Emerge."

In addition to our keynote topic, we are keeping with our theme, "Birding and Conservation: The Crown of the Continent," by featuring two pre-festival workshops on Friday, June 8th. ***As for field trips we have 28 planned!***—14 each on Saturday and Sunday—guided by knowledgeable birders and naturalists familiar with the species and their habitats in the Flathead Valley, Glacier National Park and the surrounding area.

Here is just a brief sampling of some of those trips to contemplate as you look forward to the upcoming Bird Festival:

Glacier National Park; Biking and Birding on the Rails to Trails to Somers; A Walk through the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area; Bison, Birds and Blooms of the National Bison Range; Birding by Ear on the Way to Tally Lake; and Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge.

For more info, contact Larissa Berry at:
lberry@mtaudubon.org

Raffle



Scenic Float and Birdwatching on the Bitterroot River

Drawing: March 1st

1/2-3/4 Day Float

Lunch Included

Up to 2 people

Guides: Hannah Spencer & Samantha O'Byrne

To be scheduled Spring/Summer/Fall 2012

Transferrable: Great Gift Idea

All proceeds go to our local Bitterroot Audubon Society

\$5 per ticket or 5 for \$20

Call Hannah Spencer to schedule 406.381.1292 or Sam's Spade 406.363-1293

Sponsored by: Sam's Spade Garden Tools & Wares

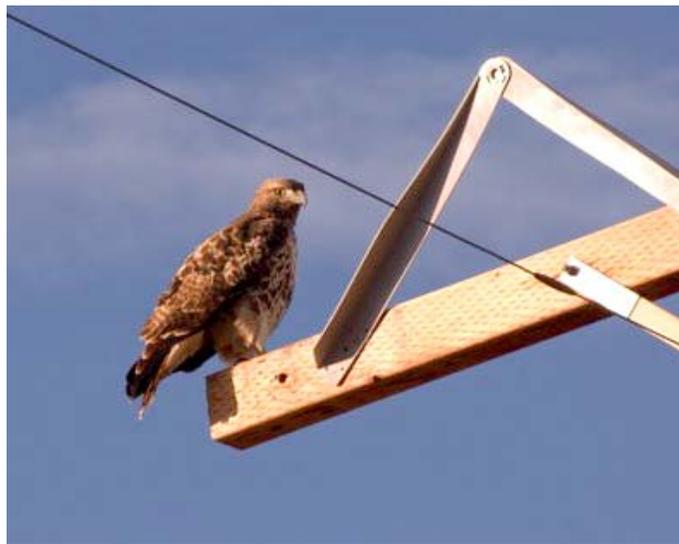
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Christmas Bird Count Results

Hamilton

By John Ormiston

The 25th annual Hamilton Christmas Bird count observers reported an above average, though not great, number of birds. The weather was decent and birds were relatively active. We recorded 68 species, three more than average and 11,248 birds, over 4,700 more than average. Once again, Bill Good outdid himself with wonderful chili, and we enjoyed the relative comfort of The Teller Wildlife Refuge facilities for gathering in the morning and at noon. There were 23 birders in the field and 30 (a record number) feeder watchers.



Courtesy Mel Holloway

If you have any questions about the Hamilton CBC, contact John Ormiston. The data from the 2000+ nationwide count circles will be available at: <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>

The Big Hole

By Kate Stone

Seven people enjoyed the best conditions a wintry Big Hole has to offer in the 5th annual Big Hole Christmas Bird Count. Two carloads covered the roads surrounding Wisdom, while one group hiked the Big Hole National Battlefield (and one anonymous birder fell into the Big Hole River!). Most participants were treated to at least one life bird on this count, as we added the snowy owl, gyrfalcon, and hoary redpoll to the species list this year. The group saw a total of 19 species. The snow bunting was the top bird (199), followed by the common redpoll (105), black-billed magpie (77), common raven (40), and the rough-legged hawk (35). Other new species to the count included the European starling and the red-winged blackbird. Despite open water, we failed to detect any

waterfowl on this count. A complete species list for the count can be seen on the Bitterroot Audubon website.

Stevensville

By Dave Lockman

The 47th annual Stevensville Christmas Bird Count took place on December 31, 2011. Thirty-five field observers and 20 feeder watchers combined to try to find all the birds in the “count circle,” which includes all the habitat within a 15 mile diameter circle centered at the Stevensville Ranger Station. Count Day weather was very pleasant, with highs near 40 degrees and some periods of sun and no precipitation. Relatively mild temperatures through most of December resulted in little to no snow cover and much more open water than usual. Birds seemed to be more widely dispersed than normal, with many feeder watchers lamenting the lack of birds at their feeders.



Courtesy Karen Griffing

Results are still somewhat preliminary, but our initial totals were 10,071 birds representing 87 different species. This species count ties our previous record set in 2007, and is probably the second highest in Montana again this year behind Big Fork. We didn't add any new species this year, so the cumulative species count for the 47 years of the Stevensville CBC remains at 155. Unusual species found this year included a Spotted Sandpiper along the Bitterroot River south of Stevensville, and one Wood Duck and one Northern Shoveler at Lee Metcalf NWR. We set new records for the number of Northern

Harriers, American Kestrels and American Dippers seen, and tied records for Great Horned Owl, Spotted Sandpiper, Canyon Wren and Common Grackle. Several of these unusual species and new record numbers are probably a result of the relatively mild winter we've had this year.

Thanks to all those who contributed part or all of their day for making the Stevensville CBC so successful again this year!

Would you like to see the newsletter in **COLOR**? Visit www.BitterrootAudubon.org and click the link to download the current newsletter or visit the archives.

You can sign up to have an e-copy sent to your email inbox by contacting Susie Duff, our Membership Chair at 961-5455 or sduff1@aol.com. Please include "Newsletter" in the subject line.

News and Notes

Call for Photos-Bitterroot Audubon is seeking images of birds for a new feature in our newsletter: *Bird shots*. If you have taken a great photo and would like to submit it for consideration, please email the jpeg image with a brief description (who took the photo, what is the subject, where the photo was taken, and any interesting details) to BASeditors@gmail.com.

Float Trip Raffle-In the spirit of supporting our community, Hannah Spencer (river guide and birding enthusiast) and Samantha O'Byrne (Sam's Spade proprietress and birding enthusiast) have joined to co-sponsor a raffle for a guided scenic float and bird-watching trip for two on the Bitterroot River in 2012.

Bird Shots



Courtesy Carol Babel

American White Pelicans, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, Spring 2011

All proceeds will go directly to the Bitterroot Audubon Society, the local chapter of the National

Calendar of Events

Jan 16-Audubon Meeting at the Forest Service/DNRC Building, 7 PM, Board Mtg. at 5 PM

Now-Feb 29, 2012-Bitterroot River float trip raffle tickets on sale.

Feb 17-20-Great Backyard Bird Count

Feb 20- Audubon Meeting, Lee Metcalf NWR, 7 PM

Jun 8-10, 2012-Montana Bird Festival, Kalispell

Audubon Society. Tickets are available at \$5 per ticket or 5 for \$20, and can be purchased from Bitterroot Audubon Society board members, at the meetings in January and February, or from Sam's Spade Garden Tools & Wares located at 111 South 4th Street in Hamilton, MT. The drawing will be held at the store on March 1, 2012.

Hawk Migration-The Hawk Migration Association of North America is looking for Citizen Science Volunteers to monitor over-wintering raptors. Kate Stone is coordinating this effort in the Bitterroot Valley. Participants generally commit to identifying and counting hawks along a 30-mile route, four times in the winter season. If interested in participating in this project, please contact Kate (381-1115) to be assigned a route. More information is available at the following website: <http://www.hmana.org/wrs.php>.

BITTERROOT AUDUBON
PO BOX 326
HAMILTON MT 59840-0326

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EMAIL: contactus@bitterrootaudubon.org

WEBSITE: www.BitterrootAudubon.org

Chapter Only Membership

The Bitterroot Audubon Chapter Only Membership is \$15/year. These members will be supporting local chapter activities, receive 9 issues of the newsletter, and enjoy Chapter benefits. To join as a Chapter Only Member, complete this form.

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____
Email: _____

Check this box to receive full color email-only newsletters delivered to your inbox.

Send this application with \$15 to:



Bitterroot Audubon Society
PO Box 326
Hamilton, MT 59840-0326

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Become a member of the **National Audubon Society** and **Bitterroot Audubon** [Chapter Code C1ZN580Z]. You will receive *Audubon* magazine, *Bitterroot Audubon Newsletter* and a membership card. *Introductory membership is \$20.*

Name: _____
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Send this application and your check to:



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